

Fairfax Center Phase II Working Group

Meeting Minutes

September 3, 2015

Attendance

Working Group: Jackie Bradley, Sherry Fisher, Chris Grisafe, Jim Katcham, Jeff Parnes, Vincent Picciano, Roni Robins, Jeff Saxe, Robbie Stark, Tony Wiley

Staff: Kim Rybold (DPZ), Ken Sorenson (DPZ)

Introduction

Jim Katcham, Chairman of the Fairfax Center Area Phase II Working Group, called the meeting to order at 7:08 pm. He referenced the revised minutes that were distributed to the Working Group prior to the meeting and asked if there were any comments or corrections. Vince Picciano made a motion to approve the minutes, and Chris Grisafe seconded the motion. The Working Group approved the minutes 9-0.

Areawide Guiding Principles Discussion

A compilation of submissions for proposed comprehensive plan changes was distributed to the group, along with a compilation of maps from the evening's presentation and discussion.

Each Working Group member was given four post-it notes and was asked to identify four key topics that an updated Fairfax Center Area Plan should address to guide development in the next 20-30 years. Members were asked to pick one theme from each of these categories: land use, transportation, and public amenities, as well as one additional topic of choice from any category. The post-it notes were aggregated and used as a starting point for discussion.

Of all of the topics, most of the responses were related to transportation and land use. Several of the responses noted that the Fairfax Center Area lacks a central focal point. Kim Rybold asked the group what creates a center, and what guidance should be added to the Plan to encourage development of a center. Jeff Saxe noted that the area was planned to be a mixed use center, but was more spread out unlike Reston Town Center. The area lacks a central gathering place. There is the Fair Oaks Mall and Fairfax Corner generally in the center of the area. He suggested that the Government Center could provide this opportunity, with the potential to fill the parking lots with some buildings between the Government Center and Government Center Parkway.

Roni Robins noted that there are multiple uses here but they don't always relate to each other since the Fairfax Center Area is so large. There are inadequate walkways throughout the area, and pedestrian-accessible secondary focal points are needed. Streetscaping and pedestrian planning is lacking and more accessible areas for entertainment and lifestyle type would add to the area. Big box retail is not as desirable as it once was.

Tony Wiley noted that the Fairfax Center Area should be a community, not a collection of physically-separated enclaves. Even with Fairfax Corner and the Fair Oaks Mall in close proximity, there is no way to get between the two except by driving.

Chris Grisafe noted that parking is an important consideration. The Fairfax Center Area doesn't offer night life, such as a venue to have live music.

Robbie Stark asked the group if they felt that the Fairfax Center Area is an urban center or suburban center. With more residential use comes more pedestrian and vehicular traffic.

Chris Grisafe noted that from an emergency management and resiliency standpoint, a power plant would be an opportunity to explore. In the event of a large emergency, what kind of measures does the county have in place to provide support to the area? For instance, there could be large scale power issues that additional power plants could offset. Jim Katcham replied that this idea has some validity for consideration.

Sherry Fisher asked the group if this area should be something like Dunn Loring/Merrifield, or something less dense. Her preference is for the character to remain like it currently is.

Kim Rybold noted that another topic with a lot of responses related to the need for senior housing in the area. Jim Katcham stated that the construction of living facilities for an aging population will be important in the future. Jeff Saxe asked if the Plan or Zoning Ordinance addresses these facilities. Kim Rybold noted that there is some general Policy guidance in the Plan related to senior housing, and that it can be built in multiple zoning districts.

Roni Robins stated that what we are seeing is empty nesters like to live in a condo versus a house. Vince Picciano added that housing around here is very expensive, and asked what the population mix is going to look like in the future? Will there be more older residents? What does the younger demographic want? Generally speaking we hear that is walkability and less car dependence.

Kim Rybold also briefly noted two topics related to implementation, the need to examine the checklist and the transportation funding formula. These will be considered as a part of the study.

Jeff Saxe stated that it was important for the group to clarify its thoughts regarding the area as an urban or suburban center in the future.

Sherry Fisher asked if the group will be considering other areas to be redeveloped. Kim Rybold replied that a lot of the area is already developed. The Working Group is tasked with thinking about what policies should be in place for the next 20-30 years in areas where redevelopment is possible.

Jeff Parnes stated that there are two transit stops planned at the Fair Oaks Mall and along Stringfellow Road, and that these are the logical places for redevelopment.

Jeff Saxe agreed with Jeff Parnes and reiterated that the group shouldn't focus on a complete transformation of the area. He asked if staff could produce a map focusing on those areas that might be redeveloped taking into account age of buildings and property ownership.

Tony Wiley stated that he didn't disagree with any of these ideas, but that the group needed to figure out how to get between these places. It doesn't make sense that if you are going to go further than a mile away you have to get in a car due to a lack of connected pedestrian and bicycle facilities.

Kim Rybold noted that many of the post-it comments deal with the topics of multimodal connectivity and transit accessibility.

Sherry Fisher said that as areas are redeveloped it should be a requirement that paths be built for walking. Roni Robins asked how to change the pedestrian environment to create that connectivity in areas that aren't going to redevelop. She requested more information on programs the county uses to fund these projects and how to best develop a plan for connectivity.

Tony Wiley agreed about the need for biking and walking paths, and said that his community would like to have a path built along existing power lines.

The next step will be taking ideas from this discussion and distilling them into a draft list of guiding principles for the Fairfax Center Area. Staff will present these at the next meeting and we can revisit these topics.

Concept for Future Development

The next portion of the meeting focused on the overall Concept for Future Development. There are two submissions that would tie into this – Areawide 6, which involves the core of the Suburban Center, and Site-specific 5, which involves the area around the Stringfellow Road Park and Ride.

Kim Rybold presented the Areawide 6 submission. She displayed a map of the area and explained that the purpose of the submission is to look at the role of the core in the Suburban Center. There have been a number of Plan options added in recent years, both within and near the core. This submission proposes to look at the boundary of the core, as well as where future development opportunities may exist. Considerations for this include what the overall future vision of the area should be, to include planned intensity, and what common elements would help unite the core.

Jeff Parnes presented the Site-specific 5 submission. He said it focuses on the proposed transit stops, and specifically, requests to look at the planned density around Interstate 66 and Stringfellow Road. He would like to see planning in this area like what was done along the transit stations in the Reston area. Earlier plans in other parts of the county failed to plan enough density around transit stations, such as Vienna.

Kim Rybold provided some considerations related to this submission. Most of the area within a half mile radius of the planned transit station, including the park and ride, is considered to be Suburban Neighborhoods. The Policy Plan recommends land use patterns that protect stable neighborhoods such as these. The area within the half-mile radius consists of over 1,800 parcels of land, requiring a much greater effort to consolidate properties. This is problematic and is why recommendations in other areas focus heavily on commercial properties that are larger and easier to consolidate. Additionally, other residentially-oriented Transit Station Areas (TSAs) in Fairfax County, such as the West Falls Church TSA have been shrinking in size as they are generally surrounded by stable residential neighborhoods.

To get some feedback on these submissions, the Working Group was asked two questions. First, what are distinguishing features of the area we should define as the core and how should it function?

Roni Robins noted that we are using core as a singular, but she sees it as dual cores. One is south of Interstate 66 and the other is north of Interstate 66. The core should include the area of the future transit station and Fairfax Corner.

Sherry Fisher asked why a core has to be identified. It seems like there could be more than one, like Fair Lakes.

Jeff Saxe proposed identifying where the Metro Station would be, and then look at a radius around that area. The mall, Government Center, Fairfax Corner and the area on the east side of West Ox Road should be included in the core. There should be connectivity from the edges of the Fairfax Center Area to the core. He did not think that Sub-unit J1, Fairfax Town Center, should remain in the core since it is more of a transition. The group agreed but there was debate as to whether J1 should remain in the core. This will be revisited in the next meeting.

There was also some debate as to whether or not Fair Lakes constituted a separate core. This area will be revisited at the next meeting.

The second question asked by staff was since SS5 is not currently in the core or entirely within the Suburban Center, does this idea fit into the overall vision for the Fairfax Center Area?

Jeff Saxe did not think the group should consider these single family neighborhoods for redevelopment around the Stringfellow transit center. Perhaps the focus should be limited to the park and ride lot and the western portion of Fair Lakes.

Jeff Parnes noted that there are areas close to the transit station that could be redeveloped or intensified, such as the elementary school south of Interstate 66. If transit does not come to the corridor, then the Plan language would not be implemented.

Chris Grisafe asked if the group could consider a power facility in the area of the former landfill. Roni Robins stated that emergency planning is probably better examined at a countywide level. Tony Wiley noted that there would be environmental issues in putting a power plant there.

Kim Rybold said that the group would discuss these topics further at the next meeting, and will look at one of the transportation submissions. The next meeting date will be selected using a poll, which will be sent out in the next week.

Chairman Jim Katcham adjourned the meeting at 9:15 pm.